

TEAR DOWN THIS WALL

By Congressman Jerry Moran

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President Ronald Reagan said: "If you seek peace, if you seek prosperity ... if you seek liberalization ... Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Almost 23 years later, that same logic holds true, only the government is not the Soviet Union and the wall is not made of bricks and mortar. Instead, the country is Cuba and the wall is U.S. laws and regulations that inhibit food and agricultural sales and prohibit American citizens from traveling to Cuba.

I have long fought for the right of American farmers and ranchers to sell U.S. produce to a willing buyer that is only 90 miles away. In 2000, I was able to help farmers realize this opportunity with the passage of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSREEA). Almost over night, agricultural exports to Cuba began to rapidly expand. Unfortunately, in 2005, the U.S. Treasury put in place regulations that unnecessarily restricted sales of American agricultural commodities to Cuba. This caused 2005 agricultural exports to Cuba to fall nearly ten percent from 2004 levels, followed by an additional decrease in exports in 2006. Since that time I have worked to overturn those regulations to allow U.S. agriculture to realize its full potential, which the International Trade Commission indicates could be an additional \$1 billion.

Another basic freedom I have long fought for is the right of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. Currently, Cuba is the only nation in the world where our federal government tells its citizens: "You can't go there." Ironically, travel to nations that pose a much more substantial security risk, like North Korea and Iran, are not restricted by the same rules that prohibit travel to Cuba.

Prohibiting travel to Cuba makes it more difficult for agricultural producers to market their products in Cuba. Even more important, banning travel prevents the Cuban people from being exposed to the basic principles of freedom and capitalism that are instilled in each of us from birth. These are ideals that our citizens instinctively carry with them and often unknowingly convey to citizens of other countries through simple face-to-face interaction. Reagan knew that to be true in 1987 and that is why he challenged Mikhail Gorbachev to open the gates between East and West Berlin. Reagan knew the best way to defeat communism was to expose it to democratic thought and free market principles, which could only be carried by citizens of free societies.

We have a unique opportunity this year to share those principles with the Cuban people and also grow American agricultural exports. I have joined Collin Peterson, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, to introduce legislation to remove unnecessary restrictions on agricultural exports. H.R. 4645, the Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2010, would also allow farmers, ranchers, and other Americans to travel to Cuba, not only to sell their goods, but to share their values. Together, we are saying, "Help us bring freedom, prosperity and liberty to the Cuban people. Help us tear down this wall!"